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ter. He is no Jeremiah, no Voltaire; he is Cervantes. And he laughs. At times it is a hearty guffaw, again it is only a twinkle in his eyes, sometimes there is a vague twist of wistfulness in his smile. But the humor is always there. And thus, even more than by his sound realism, he reveals his maturity. Youth is easily soured at the first disillusionment; age has a broader conception: it does not confuse mole-hills with mountains. It finds it easy then to laugh at the insignificance of what once seemed so charged with meaning. Cervantes laughs and we laugh with him. He would have spurned the title of philosopher, but to have made the whole world laugh optimistically at life is to have created a philosophy.

The enduring fame of Cervantes is of the highest significance as a lesson in artistic achievement. For art aims to hold up a mirror to life. Life is not

merely the exalted dreaming of the tales of chivalry or the Romanticists, nor altogether the unrelieved sordidness of the picaresque novels or the Naturalists; it lies between the two, with its moods of quixotic impulse to give battle to the enchanters that oppress it, and its moments of sanchesque yearning for the flesh-pots of the wedding feast of Camacho. Cervantes is a supreme artist because he gave a faithful image of the life of his time with its conflict of good and evil, of false and true. And since from age to age the mystery of the workings of men's hearts is unchanging, the miracle of art is eternal. So it is that the *Don Quixote* has transcended the restrictions of language and time, and to-day, as three hundred years ago, "children handle it, youths read it, men understand it, and old men celebrate it." It is a part of the universal heritage of art, "the general delight of mankind."

Ralph Hayward Keniston

THE TRUTH OF ART HISTORY

By PROFESSOR WM. M. SLOANE, Columbia University

THE close association of the fine arts, plastic, graphic and literary, has again after long alienation secured recognition among those who work in them. Sculptors, painters and writers cannot be too intimate with each other. Indeed they cannot do their best work without such an intimacy. The reason is that they are all seekers after a single and general truth. In the sense of interpreting their age and revealing it to itself they are prophets.

There was a time when giants like Michelangelo were great in all the fine arts simultaneously; and they commanded pre-eminence because the practise of all the fine arts was associated, not in a group of men but in a single personality. For Michelangelo was not alone in successful effort, though he was the great solitary in the degree of his success. Other sculptors were painters and other painters were sculptors, while both painters and sculptors were artists in architecture and in literature, prose and verse. It is not infrequent that while there is a close-knit unity in the fine arts, one of them lends itself in the creative mind better than another to a message of interpretation.

Every man knows that back of his conduct is a faith or doctrine. Back also of collective humanity throughout every age there has been some generally accepted faith or doctrine. The sincere artist must be powerfully individual in the expression of his message, but the language he speaks is meaningless to the world if he does not by close association with collective man and collective art use the universal medium for the exchange of feeling.

In this respect music is of all the fine arts quite the most successful. Highly developed as it is both technically and emotionally, it has retained the primitive human medium for conveying thought and emotion with the smallest possible alloy of conventionality. Whatever evolution there has been in each of the fine arts, it has been largely confined to their medium and their convention. The startling mural decorations of the Aurignac man, startling alike in drawing and in color, are an indication if

not a proof of this. They are actually more modern than much of what has been produced within the historic age and render the old meaning of prehistoric doubtful in its validity.

It is equally difficult in the large sense to tell the convincing truth and to tell a convincing lie. Truth telling depends quite as much on the hearer as on the teller. What you say to one man may be a complete and positive truth; to another it may either convey an absolutely false impression or be rejected as a mere absurdity. While this applies to art as well as to other forms of speech, it has been generally believed that mankind has made and used art products for no other reason than because both producer and consumer liked, and so desired, the form and ornament of the utensil, whether a pot or a picture.

The history of art therefore, in particular of the applied arts, has been regarded as that portion of the historic record more simply true than any other, less corrupted by tradition or purpose than a pictograph or a hieroglyph or an ideograph or a sound picture, or a written sentence. What men wanted they took either in barter or by violence. What they possessed and used was considered an infallible guide to their capacity and taste. What they represented for the art-record was selected for representation and permanency because it stood highest in their esteem and exhibited their degree of culture. The artist did not aim to gratify any individual buyer, nor a group of such individuals, not even a tribe or a political unit, but as Wordsworth, alike a great poet, a great critic and also a practising landscape architect, declared in a letter: the true servant of the arts pays homage to the human kind as impersonated in unwarped and enlightened minds. He had in mind the elect person.

That this sense of certitude about art-history as sublimely true has a certain justification is not to be denied. But the student of history begins to feel that there lurks in it a danger and that the com-

monly accepted sense of it demands explanation and modification. The greatest artist creates what others enjoy and therefore want. The highest art is the measure of the highest intelligence at any historical moment. This we hold to be self-evident.

But the highest intelligence is generally dormant in so far as it has had no stimulus and training. It has to be revealed to itself, and that is one mission of the artist. He cannot create the taste but his creation can, and, if a true creation, does draw aside the curtain which obscures the taste. Art can be creative only in so far as it creates the art language, the art concept and the art audience or assistance in the sense of "unwarped, enlightened" commonalty, conscious of having its own revealed to it by poet, painter, sculptor, architect, historian, composer or dramatist.

The widest difference between the person who is somebody and the low mediocrity of the mass consists in the power innate and cultivated to use his senses; to hear, see, taste, touch and smell, fully and accurately. The vice of the western world is extreme analysis, a vice which always leads to doubt and agnosticism, as soon as it passes the critical stage. We have studied the connection between sensation and perception until we are lost in a labyrinth of casuistry. In fact, clear sense impressions release all the subsequent automatic processes and create by unconscious reflexes that which we designate from the most exquisite of our senses as taste—taste in sight, hearing, smelling, feeling and their resultant, judgment. This sounds very learned and complex but it is not.

Taste in the artistic sense is a normal, simple, inevitable quality resident in all who are completely alive in the use of their faculties: physical and spiritual. This is not to say, however, that this unsophisticated generality is conscious of its taste. Leaving out the artificial, overeducated and hypersensitive few who claim the high seats of society, and the dull, sottish, animalized few who hold the subcellar of a people, there resides in the great onflowing mass of mankind a fairly universal taste which can be revealed to it. Those who feel it and grasp it are the artists, those who record its successive phases are the historians. In this sense and in this sense only is the art-record the plain and simple material on which the historian may rely as material unadulterated by selfishness and unclouded by individual perversity.

It is said that painters and children possess the power of seeing things as they appear to be and not as they are known to be. A French novelist of the higher rank (Loti) declares that the only truth told in words is the narrative of a little child, describing what he has seen. Another (Zola) defines a work of art as any bit of nature seen athwart a temperament. These three interesting and basic statements are true and inclusive. They establish the fact that art is personal to the artist, as what was said before makes sure the truth that aside from scum and sediment it is also universal. In this sense it is a condition of life, not an accessory or adornment of it. It expresses not so much thought as irrepressible feeling or emotion. The language, therefore, must be comprehensive to all men of all ages. It must be crystal clear. It was the conviction that no truth is hazy, which led Descartes to announce without fear of contradic-

tion that clarity is truth. This axiom is just as pertinent in the expression of feeling as in the expression of thought.

Here is where art and science touch, and coalesce. Both are absolutely plain to the wayfarer, both emancipate mankind from the confusion of mind and matter, both are great liberators because both free us from the bondage of prejudice or of ignorance. It is a "steep and thorny way to heaven" which both show, because both compel effort, and thinking hurts, as right feeling does: it is pseudo-science and pseudo-art which "like a puff'd and reckless libertine the primrose path of dalliance treads." The truth of science and the truth of art, when art and science are correctly delimited, the revelation of general feeling and of general knowledge, is the truth of history. What science knows and what art feels is the general language, understood by all sane men of the same stage of culture or state of society. Its expression is conduct: as we think and feel so we act. Such a delimitation would require volumes of writing. Yet without discussion we are sensible of one outstanding consideration.

There has always been a lying, meretricious art and also a lying, meretricious science. The lure of the former is so-called beauty, search for the absolute; of the latter, joy, the zest of research. Both have been caviar to the multitude employing a symbolism and a terminology carefully devised to obfuscate the initiated few and bar out the common good sense of the many. The finite mind pretends alike to feel and know the infinite: infinite material, boundless emotion. Thus, reasonably considered in relation to human powers, beauty and joy would be chimerical ideals: forever receding, forever deliquescing.

In such terms it would be impossible to write history, the first concern of which is man and his doings, not in chaotic individualism but in the organized mass. The grapes of history as either literature alone or science alone are sour: and those that grow on the stem of what claims to be the art record are just as choky and astringent as any others. To secure a ripe and palatable fruit we are forced to democratize in our best and latest sense. In this sense literature is that one of the fine arts which first showed the way. "Strange and awkward" as "the language of conversation among the middle and lower classes" or, as better expressed, "The real language of men in a state of vivid emotion" appeared to the preciousness of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—when employed in poetry, it is precisely that form of speech and the emotion it expresses which have kept the central course ever since; not in English alone but in the tongue of every western land.

This democracy in art has tended, moreover, to an unbroken growth in the elevation, the leveling up of standards. Our democratic generation asserts itself in many ways, some of them wild and ill-considered; but it is sane in its demand for a poetry which it can understand and for a history which it can read without strain. It has secured both. In the distant future investigators will feel that the record of our poetry (and in great measure of our prose) can be regarded as trustworthy material for the desired historical truth.

To the present writer it likewise seems as if the true democracy of art were revealed also in archi-

itecture and its ancillary arts, especially decorative painting and sculpture.

Throughout the western world and since the reign of democracy enormous sums have been voted with popular approval for civic, commercial and national structures; for memorial, historical and educational purposes. These monuments have nothing of what is called republican simplicity either in design, ornamentation or equipment. They are sumptuous in size, in elegance, in form and in color. Communities, once puritanical in religion and still puritanical in secular conviction, have shown the way. Their public revels in libraries, in elaborate parks and gardens, in museums, galleries of fine art historically disposed and complete, in all the wealth which delights the eye and instructs the mind, such as other states of society, tyrannies, monarchical aristocracies or oligarchies have never been able to create or assemble. The individual Croesus is a born democrat of the purest type and remains one in his rôle of benevolent founder and patron of the fine arts. But he is insignificant in comparison with the village, town, city and state when it comes to munificent provision for the universal art impulse. There has been such a general uplifting of taste among the sane and sober masses, always excepting the overfed, underdressed and bored scum at the top, as well as the idle, vicious, wasteful and multitudinous dregs at the bottom! The historian of our time when seeking for historical truth will be profoundly impressed by the monuments in which a disciplined and orderly democracy has revealed itself through the prophetic, interpreting and inspiring artist.

With the views and visions of Tolstoi's "What Is Art?" and Whitman's "Democratic Vistas" the disciplined man can have but little sympathy, I fear. The ultra-visionary is just as dangerous as the conservative stand-patter. To attribute inherent goodness to all men is the negation of experience. No more is taste a quality of the vulgar herd, nor is the sense of beauty instinctive. It is still possible to write a history which is the record of the crimes and follies of mankind. There is so much that is meretricious in what masquerades as art that pessimism still remains the luxury of the overeducated and overrefined. The sunny disposition of the Utopian observer and recorder is subject to almost continuous eclipse: but the like propensity in those who know that labor is the painful surmounting of obstacles to the true expression of "wide commonalty" rejoices in the occasional and recurrent sunbursts, which are its sure reward.

Is our poetry and art democratic? The general feeling is vaguely negative: that what we produce is without reality, a shadow of the old aristocratic best, a readjustment of the old to new conditions. To this we can by no means assent. In the first place: What is democratic Art? If there be one, there must also be an aristocratic art, and a middle class, and

a vulgar, etc. To state such foolishness is to refute it. There is but one art and to democratize it is to make it accessible to all. *Ceci tuera cela* was said of the printing-press and architecture. What has been the answer of time to such foreboding?

Democracy erects and admires buildings of the first importance and expresses itself thereby: the printing-press produces the horrors of pulp paper, scare heads and the colored supplement; but it also makes "Everyman's Library" and similar collections paying ventures. Small profits but enormous sales! says the dealer and the people respond. Were it possible, and doubtless some day the process will be discovered, to reproduce at a trifling expense the exquisite line, the perfect color, the pellucid atmosphere and the bold modeling of great painters, there would be a response by the democracy absolutely parallel to its avidity for the cheap good book. We would know in what sense to use the term democratic art, and realize that the democratic motto: Get the Best was nowise a pretense. Democracy in whatever sense we use the word demands and gets the best, not in all the segments of life at once, but in each successively.

Jingoism is a disgusting vice, but so is its reverse, the cringing self-depreciation which false pride begets so widely in this present community and age. That relatively we have attained to so little, and that there is an unexplored ocean of human perfectibility beyond are subjects for gratitude. Every artist knows the keen disappointment of failure, more or less constant and continuous in every completed task. But the great sane commonalty applies the acid test to his works.

It was a very great painter indeed who shortly wrote to me that in his sixty-seventh year he was still earning about three thousand dollars annually by selling pictures, keeping the wolf from the door, and simultaneously teaching protective coloring to the belligerents, pouring out his substance for a cause he upholds as dear as life and variously otherwise influencing his people and his times.

To me such activity and forward straining after thirteen completed lustrums seem the attainment of the crown of life. Whether my correspondent considers himself a happy man or not is not clear. He seems to suffer somewhat from the fear of the inevitable. But that our day and generation, applying the acid test, demanding to be made known to itself, recognizing its own image though in a glass darkly, should continue such a man at his post, that the man should defy superannuation, conclusively proves that to the competent, discerning critic there is in the record of art history a great and trustworthy revelation of the larger historical truth which enters into every complete account of a state of society.

William Milligan Sloane

